

[Up on the Hill]

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MEN AGAINST GRANITE

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I UP ON THE HILL

The car passed through crooked streets lined with frame houses, turned sharply and labored up a steep grade between great pyramids of waste granite. The valleys below were still drowned in white mist, but the hilltop stood clear in the early morning light. The homely wooden houses of Graniteville and Websterville were scattered over the broad summit of Millstone Hill, their windows catching the long flat rays of the rising sun. In the distance the mountains stood ranked against the sky. Five of the six men crowded into the automobile were silent, still sullen from sleep. The sixth, the youngest and biggest, was Dominick Mori and he was kidding and laughing through the smoke of his cigarette.

Leroux, the blacksmith, said: "You're too damn cheerful for so early in the morning, Dom. You're worse'n my wife. She's a Swede and nothing bothers her. She gets up so cheerful it driven me crazy."

"Must be because I live right," grinned Dom Mori.

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"Hell," said Leroux. "At your age a man don't have to live right."

At the top of the grade they wheeled round into a row of parked cars, and the men got out with their dinnerpails. It was 2 just before eight o'clock. Dom Mori walked past derrick-masts and across railroad tracks to the wooden guard-rail at the brink of the quarry. It was a vast open pit some three-hundred feet deep. The granite had a clean gray look; the walls were sliced down step by step an with a giant knife. Overhead was a network of guywires and cables interlaced against the pale blue sky. On all sides loomed gaunt mounds of grout, giving the entire hill the appearance of a ruined fortress.

Dow Mori joined his friend, [Pepe?] Perez, another strapping youngster, on the quarry rim. Perez grinned and tossed his black head. "Another day in the hole, kid." He swore. "If anyone told me five years ago I'd be in a quarry I'd told him be was nuts. It's the last thing I ever thought of doing, Dom."

"Better than being in the army, Pepe."

"You'll be in the army yet, boy," Perez said. "I've got a wife and a kid."

"They're going to take married men first. They're more used to fighting," said Don Mori.

"Well, here we go."

Now the men were climbing down the steep plank stairs into the quarryhole, French, Italian, Spanish, Irish and Scotch, carrying lunchboxes and tools. It was a long way down. The stairs seemed to drop sheer and dizzily under your feet. At the bottom it was still damp and cold; the sun wasn't high enough to penetrate the depths. The pump man already sucking water from the lowest corner. Dominick Mori left Perez and joined the Old-Timer, Lavalley, a veteran French quarryman with whom 3 he worked.

They crossed the uneven stone floor and climbed a high ladder made of logs with two-by-fours for rungs. All around the quarry men were climbing such ladders to work on shelves

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at various levels. Dom Mori and the old-Timer were well up toward the rim, and that was good because the sun reached them early. The blocks they were to work on had already been chalked off by the boss, and yesterday they had drilled along the chalklines with channel bars. Now the pieces were partly loosened from their bed on the ledge.

The Old-Timer said they wouldn't have to call the powder man up to blast them out, they could do it with the air drills. The old-Timer didn't like to use dynamite or even black powder. The rock they were working on was good and clear, unstreaked by salt-horse or black-horse, the grain running horizontal in a drift. It would be good stuff for the stonecutters down in the City to work with, and Dom thought of his older brother, Aldo, who was a carver. Dom and Aldo were very close, pals as well as brothers, and Dom had been lonely ever since Aldo got married and moved from the Hill down into Barre.

Dom and his mother were alone in the house on the Hill now. His father was dead. It was a nice comfortable little home, but now with Aldo gone too it seemed empty. His mother never complained but Dom knew she must be lonesome there all day by herself. And nights as well when he was out with Angela. Sometimes Dom took his mother to movies down in the City. He was 4 proud of her. She still looked young and handsome, and she was so understanding and generous and devoted.

"Well, how's the old strike-breaker this morning?" Dom grinned at his mate.

"Don't be calling me a scab," growled the Old-Timer. "I told you I came here in 1892 when I was nineteen years old. I was here before most of you Wops. I came down from Quebec."

"Sure," kidded Dominick. "In 1921 when they brought all you farmers down from Canada to break the strike and take all the jobs."

"What do you know, a young punk like you?" said the Old-Timer. "I was right here and I helped lick some of them scabs, too. We had some fun with them new fellers. They was all farmers, they didn't know nothing, and they worked cheap. I know some union men helped

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show them new Frenchmen the trade. That was a bad thing. After that big strike I didn't get no work for two years. Two whole years, by God."

The chatter of the pneumatic drills now made conversation impossible. Dust clouded up around them as the steel chewed into the gray stone.

Old-Timer Lavalley was a short stocky man of sixty-seven with a face like wrinkled leather and red-rimmed eyes. Dust covered him and lined the deep creases in the back of his neck. He threw one leg over his jack-hammer and the vibration shook his entire body. Dom Mori held his own drill steady with powerful young arms. Lavalley had been in the quarries ever since 1892, except for six years in the Ely Copper Mine at Vershire. His father had worked the asbestos mines in the Province of Quebec before coming to Barre. A quarry accident killed him. Lavalley had been on the Hill a long time and raised a family there. Now there was only one daughter left at home, and she kept house for the Old-Timer. His wife was dead and all the others had gone away, married and settled down elsewhere. None of his sons were in the granite business. Lavalley didn't want them in it. "No place for a young feller, in the quarries," he said.

The Old-Timer had a little house of his own in Upper Graniteville, a quiet pleasant place to live now. He could remember when it was like a mining town in full boom; and nothing quiet about it then. The hill was a wild raw place in those early days. The workers were mostly young, unmarried and reckless. They lived in boarding-houses, spent their money freely, and did a lot of hard drinking. "Salting the colt," was what they called driving a horse-and-buggy out into the country to buy a jug of cider from some farmer. The arrival of the stagecoach bringing the mail from Barre was a great event each day at six P.M.

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Was it Black Mike or Red John who said, "What do we do? We don't do nothing but work and eat and sleep. On payday we hire a team, go to Barre; get drunk, smash the wagon, and pay a fine or go to jail."

Then a derrick was operated by hand-power, two men on the crank. Later horses were hitched to long sweeps and plodded 6 about in a circle to generate power for the derrick. A quarryman couldn't earn more than \$2.25 a day at that time, but money went a lot farther then. That was as good as \$7 or \$8 a day now, maybe better.

The Hill had changed all right. It was settled and peaceful now, the workers were family men, the boarding-houses were gone. The Old-Timer seldom went down to the City any more; most of his friends were dead or gone away. He liked best the long summer evenings, cool and still on his porch after getting the sun all day in the quarry. Every evening he sat there smoking his pipe until the shadows deepened and the lights winked on. The smell of green earth and woodlands was sweet after the hot stonedust of the daytime. Lavalley missed Marie, his wife, but he never spoke of her... In the summer his sons and daughters brought their families to visit, and he was happy playing with his grand-children.

He was glad he had stayed away from the sheds in Barre. It was better to be out in the open air. In the sheds he wouldn't have lasted this long. Dante Mori, Dom's father, had been under fifty when he died. There was more money down there; in the quarries they lost many days because of bad weather. But he was satisfied to have it the way it was.

The Old-Timer really preferred a smaller quarry, where six or eight men did all the work. There you had to do everything; here each man had his own special job. But even in a big quarry like this the bosses didn't bother you much. Each man went about his task with a calm assurance. There was little bossing and no slave-driving. Under the heat and racket the men were stolid, patient, and efficient.

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The sun climbed higher until it was burning into his back. Lavalle stopped drilling, cleaned the stone and his clothing with blasts from the air-hose, inspected the cleavage, and straightened to rest his aching body. He was still tough and strong, but he tired quicker than he used to. It was hard work, even for brawny youngsters of twenty-one like Dom Mori. He liked the big good-looking boy who worked and laughed beside him and kidded him so much.

Dom paused to use the hose on himself and the block. The dust fanned up and thinned in the sunlit air. Dom Mori turned to face the sun and stretch his limbs in its bright warmth. He took off his faded blue workshirt. His splendid torso was already burnt darkly by sun and wind, tapering from broad shoulders and deep chest down to a trim waist. His dark hair curled damp and close on his heads and his eyes were clear and blue.

Old-Timer Lavalle said; "I bet you got lots of girls, huh?"

Dominick Mori laughed. "Sure, hundreds of 'em, Old-Timer."

"You ain't no movie star," Lavalle said, spitting and turning back to his drill.

"Take it easy now," warned Dom.

"Don't worry, I'll take it easy," said Lavalle. "I'm old enough to know how to do that."

***** 8 Up on the surface the riggers were greasing some of the derricks and hoists, and the yard was alive with the clattering din of jack-hammers where other workers were cutting blocks down to size. Scotty Kincaid backed his locomotive up the track and waited for the flatcars to be loaded.

On the shelf where Pepe Perez worked in the quarry they were roping a block for the derrick. Perez signalled with long arms to the head derrickman at the top of the quarry, who relayed the signal on to the engineer at the controls in the engine-room. A whistle

Library of Congress

shrilled sharply through the general din, and workmen on the bottom moved out of the way as the huge boom swung across the pit. Perez stood with hands on hips waiting for the cable. Chains were made fast, tested, and Perez applied the big hook. Everyone watched as the block stirred, swayed free and lifted slowly. Last week a stone had dropped with the toppling crash of thunder, skidded across the floor and pinned the Spaniard Manuel against the wall with a crushed leg. Manuel's scream had pierced the echoing roar of the hurtling block. Now they all thought of that as thirty-odd tons of granite swung clear and up over the quarry.

Steadily the mass of rock went up and vanished over the far rim. The man in the hole shook the sweat out of their eyes and went back to work. Big Pepe Perez yelled across: "That's the way to get 'em out fast, Dominick!"

Before noon Dom Mori had his piece free and went about cutting it in halves. First he used the air drill to bore a row of holes; then he inserted plugs in the holes and took up the sledge hammer. Moving along the row he swung the sledge with force and precision, one stroke to each plug. The line of cleavage was barely discernible in the beginning. As he repeated the process the line widened. The blazing sun was high and hot now, and Dom's brown body gleamed with sweat. The muscles flowed and rippled under the skin as he swung the hammer.

The twelve o'clock whistle was welcome. Men climbed down the ladders to their lunch-boxes on the bottom. Old-Timer Lavalley stayed on his ledge. "I ain't got no women to brag about with you young fellers," he told Dom. Some of the quarrymen mounted the long steep stairway to the surface, but most felt that it was too much of a climb. Dom Mori took some drill points to Leroux, the blacksmith, for sharpening. Steel loses its edge quickly on the hard-fibred rock.

Allaire Leroux sat near his red-glowing forge, a slender man with a sharply cut face and whimsical blue eyes. The term blacksmith seemed incongruous until you noticed his strong

Library of Congress

hands, muscular arms and shoulders. Even with the sun's glare and the heat from the forge Allaire Leroux looked cool.

"I don't sweat no more," Leroux said. "I can't sweat. I'm a sick man, Dom."

"You don't drink enough, Al," Dom told him.

"I don't drink nothing now," Leroux said sorrowfully. "I can't take a drop. My stomach is all gone. I don't mind not drinking so much, but I can't eat either. I always liked to eat and I get goddamn hungry now. But to keep on working I got to be careful what I eat."

"I thought they fixed you all up at the Veteran's Hospital in White River.

"Hell, no. That's a nice place they got there, but they didn't do me much good. I was there about a month and I got sick of it. I didn't feel any better and I got lonesome for my wife and kids. So one day I asked for my clothes and got out of there. I can't stand laying round doing nothing. When I get home from here I always work round the house or garden. There's always things to be done, and I feel better doing them."

Don Mori munched a salaami sandwich and washed it down with cool red wine, while [Allaire?] Leroux used his tongs to adjust tools heating in the fire.

"How'd you take up tool-sharpening, Al?" Dom asked.

"I don't know. I tried about everything. My old man was a farmer and I tried that awhile. All I liked about that was trading cattle and horses and equipment. I put over some nice deals, too. I worked in a garage, and I did carpenter work. I was a jack of trades, Dom... But when I was a kid I used to hang round the blacksmith shop in the village. In them days the stone-cutting tools went to regular blacksmiths to be sharpened. The shop on the Hill was a great place for the old-timers to hang out. I liked to listen to them. There was Black Mike, the Irishman; Red John, the Scotchman; old Jed Wygant, the biggest liar of all; and that giant Swede Svensen. They always had a bottle to pass round while they told lies

Library of Congress

about drinking, fighting, 11 women, and how strong they were. They gave me my first drink." Allaire Leroux grinned boyishly. "I guess I started growing my stomach ulcers right there."

It all came back to him as he talked. The clanging music of hammer and anvil, the smoke and heat, the smell of hot iron and leather, horses and men. There he had learned about fires, forges, and putting an edge on steal tools.

"You still run that roller-skating place, Al?"

"Yeah, three nights a week," Leroux said. "I go home from the quarry, take a bath, change and eat supper. On this diet of mine it don't take long to eat. Then I drive my wife down to the rink and we work until midnight. It makes a long day, but I don't mind it, I like to keep busy, and it means a little extra money." He drew a chisel from the coals and placed it on the anvil.

"How's your girl, Dominick? Why don't you bring Angela round to the house sometime? I'm not drinking but I keep a little stuff on hand. I'd like to see your brother Aldo and his wife, too. We don't see Aldo much since he got married and moved down to the City."

"I don't either," said Dom Mori. "But I'll bring them all over sometime, Al. Well, back to the chain-gang it is." The whistle was blowing, and men started clambering back to work.

The afternoon passed swiftly enough for Dom Mori, working and joking with Old-Timer Lavalley.

They got their pieces ready to go out, and Dam signalled 12 to the derrickman, drawing his hand across his stomach for the inch-and-a-half rope, and a slicing palm-to-palm motion for the half-inch chain. The Old-Timer was an expert with ropes and chains. The blocks

Library of Congress

were made secure one by one, hooked to the derrick, and lifted steadily up and out. Dom Mori and the Old-Timer watched them go with quiet satisfaction.

“Good pieces,” Old-Timer Lavalley said. “Damn good stone.”

“Good enough to hold somebody under the ground,” Dom said cheerfully.

The Old-Timer shook his dusty head. “You don't want to talk like that, son. It's bad luck.”

The boss signalled to Dom Mori, pointing out a new man and tapping the fingers of one hand on the outstretched palm of the other. “You're right,” Dom grinned at the Old-Timer. “No rest for the wicked.” He descended the ladder to help the channel bar operator on the quarry floor. The man was nervous and having trouble guiding the long vibrating bar. Dom Mori laid hold and steadied it for him. The bottom was in shadow now as the sun lowered, and Dom's sweaty body cooled rapidly.

The danger whistle sounded and the vicious clamor of pneumatic tools stopped. They were ready to blast at the far end of the pit, and men moved out of the way and took cover. The explosion shocked the eardrums and reverberated from wall to wall. Fragments of rock flew wildly and clattered as they fell.

“Hey, Mori! The Greeks are coming!” Pepe Pares shouted as the noise faded, and Dom grinned good-naturedly when the men laughed at him. He had no more sympathy for Mussolini and Fascism in Italy than he had for Hitler and the Nazis.. Like most of the Italians of Barre Dom Mori had been shamed and sickened when Mussolini declared war on already-beaten France. And the conduct of the Italian troops in Albania and Egypt had shown that the Italian people as a whole did not want war.

Then it was four o'clock, the seven working-hours were ended, and the quarriers started the long climb up towards the blue cloud-bannered sky.

Library of Congress

"Now about a bottle of beer, Dom?" Pope Perez asked.

Dom Mori shook his head, "Some other time, Pepe. I've got to stop in Websterville."

"Ain't love wonderful?" jeered big Perez. "Well, we'll have to go out to my camp some Sunday. See you tomorrow, boy,"

A train of flatcars loaded with granite blocks stood on the track. Dom Mori pulled on his high school football jacket and boarded the engine with old Scotty Kincaid. "How about a ride, Chief?"

Scotty Kincaid's seamed red face twisted and he spat tobacco juice through his stained gray moustache. "That girl again, is it? I used to think you'd grow up to amount to something." He scratched his gray head and tugged his sooty blue cap back into place. "How are you, laddie?"

"Fine, Scotty, and how's the Chief? Did you hear that one about the Scotchman who found the twenty-five cent piece?"

"Aye, he married it," said the engineer gravely. 14 "You always hear the Scotch jokes before I do," complained Dom, grinning.

"I'm the man that makes them up," Scotty Kincaid said.

He started the locomotive and they wound slowly down the steep track between high walls of granite blocks. Coming out into the open they saw the hazy blue-gray barrier of mountains on the western skyline. The slanting sun made patterns of lavender shade on the nearer slopes and valleys, and farm clearings were open patches in the forest. Below the railroad track were the roofs of Websterville, and Dom Mori picked out the trim white house where Angela lived.

Dow Mori took the shortcut toward his own home in Graniteville, with a singing in his breast and a strong swinging stride. He looked forward to his afternoon swim in the abandoned quarryhole, but it had been better when he and Aldo swam there together. Everything was better with Aldo. Without Aldo he felt not quite whole somehow, yet when he thought of the girl he had just left he couldn't be lonely. Angela had the fair hair and skin, the clean gray eyes of northern Italy. Angela was lovely, Angela was his.

He turned once to look back over the jumble of shingled roofs that was Websterville. Kids were playing ball in an open lot and their cries came to him thinly. Dom Mori wanted to play ball again himself. Most of all he wanted to play football. If he could have gone to college... Dunkirk, the Gray 15 Eagle, said Dom could have made any college club in the country. That's where he should be instead of in the quarry. He spat and set his bronzed face homeward. Across the ridge were the chimneys and church steeples of Graniteville lying under the shadow of mountains of grout, a straggling village of ugly clapboard houses built hastily in the boom days. But most of the homes were nicely furnished and well kept inside.

The path twisted through underbrush and thickets and on into the calm green depths of the woods. The sky beyond sheer granite walls and jagged piles of grout was painted in flame by the sinking sun, and an early twilight stillness was on the wooded heights. Dom Mori halted on the brink of the deserted Barclay Quarry. It was a hundred feet down to the surface of the dark water. On the opposite side derrick masts and booms leaned in a lacework of guywires. Half-buried in the ground were coils of cable and hooks of rusted iron. A long boiler lay overgrown with bushes and vines. Birds called along the outer slopes, and from the watery chasm below came the deep chunking of a bullfrog.

It was a scene of lonely grandeur and sinister beauty. Dom Mori thought of the men who had worked here to cut this gorge through a mountain of solid granite. His own father had

Library of Congress

worked here once, before going into the shed. It had been one of the biggest quarries on the Hill. Dominick remembered one night in a thunderstorm when he had seen this grim picture illuminated with green-white flares of lightning. That was the weirdest thing he had ever known. 16 As Dom Mori moved along the rim he felt as always a strong compulsion to hurl himself into the immense water-filled chasm. He wondered if suicides knew that feeling before their final leap. It was said that a man had thrown himself in there years ago, after his wife and children were burned to death. But no body had been recovered. Just the look of this place was enough to keep anyone from swimming there. Then Dom saw ahead of him the familiar tall figure of Jock Gilligan, staring down at the quarry he had worked twenty-odd years ago. They greeted one another and Don produced a pack of cigarettes.

"It's quite a sight, Dominick," said old Jock Gilligan. "It does something to a man. Especially a man who worked it. There was some good men worked in that hole, Dom, and your father was one of them. There's a lot of good stone left in there yet."

Jock Gilligan was Scotch-Irish, long of / limb and wide of shoulder, well over sixty now but still lean and hard. His thin face was red and graven with harsh lines, his narrow blue eyes crinkled when he smiled, and his jaw had an arrogant thrust. In his younger days he had knocked around all over the country, working in coal and copper mines, following the harvesters.

"What happened here, Jock? Why did they quit working it?"

"It was no good after Langhurst took it over," Jock Gilligan said. "Langhurst didn't know the business; he was just crazy for quick money. He started selling off the land, a piece at a time. Then he got a junk man in and sold all the machinery. He sold that new steam-shovel they got from the World's Fair in Chicago. They came in with blow-torches and cut everything 17 apart and lugged it away. He sold thousands of dollars worth of stuff for

Library of Congress

about eight hundred bucks. By God, it was a crime! If he'd left the machinery some other company'd be working it today. But Langhurst was no granite man.

"I tried to open a little quarry here myself, about three months ago. See that hand-derrick up by the last waterhole. But it was too much work by hand. Quarrying is slow enough with machinery. I tried to get Old-Timer Lavalley to come in with me. But I guess he's smart to stay in the quarry where he's got steady work. The granite business gets worse all the time, Dom. I can't get a job anywhere. I'm a good quarry man, too.

"I was head-derrickman here for years. That shack over there was the engine-house. I was running the derrick the day that signal boy fell to the bottom, about three hundred feet. You could hear it on top when he landed. The worst one I ever saw though was when we were blasting. I was a powder man, too. The charge didn't go off. A crazy Frenchman crawled in under the ledge and just then it blew. It fired him out like a cannonball. He was still alive and screaming and swearing. It makes me sick to think of it now. It blew the skin right off him, but it took him a long time to die. Things like that you don't forget."

Jock Gilligan flipped his cigarette and watched it drop toward the water. " Dom, I been wondering some about you. What you going to do, stay all your life in the quarries? You ought to break away, see some of the world. When I was your age I'd worked my way across the country three times. I left home in 18 New Brunswick when I was sixteen. There's lots of things to see and do, Dominick. I rode harvesting trains packed with a couple thousand men. All night the gravel from the prairies was like hail on the roof. They didn't dare stop those trains in a town. There was a copper mine in Vancouver high up in the mountains. They carried us up to it in buckets strung on a cable. Some places riding the buckets we went over canyons hundreds of feet deep, and overhead was the mountains, all rock and snow and looking ready to come roaring down on you...

"You're young, Dominick. You don't want to spend all your life down in that hole."

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"I don't intend to, Jock," said Dom Mori. "I'll got away. But I don't want to leave my mother alone now."

Jock Gilligan was still brooding on the quarry rim when Dom Mori left him and walked on his way. The sun was gone and the woods were dusky. It was late for swimming but Dom went to the little abandoned quarryhole that was near his house. He was thoughtful and troubled after listening to old Jock, and he was always lonely for Aldo when he came here to swim. Aldo had that quality of making everything seem richer and finer and more fun.

He knew Aldo was in love with Nina, yet sometimes he thought Aldo was not fully satisfied and happy. Aldo had grown grave and serious lately. Dom wondered if, after all, he should be so anxious to marry Angela. That would chain him to the quarry as it had Old-Timer Laval, Pepe Perez, Allaire Leroux, and old Jock Gilligan. Dominick wanted more out of life than that. 19 he was only twenty-one.

He stripped off his dusty clothes and stood poised on a ledge twenty feet above the water. Aldo and he had dared one another here playing follow-the-leader. Dom's toes gripped the edge of the rock and he sprang up and out in the twilight, flashing down in a long clean arc, cutting straight into the water and gliding to cold dark depths. It was pure springwater, fresh and clear. He swam to shore, scrubbed himself with the soap hidden there, and plunged in again, exulting in the flying thrill of the dive. Then he lit a cigarette and let his body dry in the air.

The cold water cleansed mind as well as body. Dom Mori hurried down the path across stony pastureland, vaulted the fence and jogged toward home. Lights twinkled in the houses of Graniteville now. In the distance farmer Nat Fulburt was calling his cows and the faint tinkle of a cowbell sounded. The upland air was sweet to breathe. Dom Mori was aware of a keen hunger for the supper his mother would have waiting for him. He sang Agnela Mia as he went.